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THE Modern Language Journal

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THE FEDERATION AND THE PROPOSED MODERN LANGUAGE JOURNAL*

Under the general caption of "The Equipment of the Modern Foreign Language Teacher in Secondary Schools" I am asked to speak on "The Federation and the Proposed Modern Language Journal." The inclusion of this topic in the general question I interpret to mean that the framers of the program are of the opinion that membership and cooperation in professional associations as well as the support and reading of vocational journals are a part of a modern language teacher's equipment. } This being decidedly also *my* view, I gladly accepted the invitation to appear before you.

From the manner in which the topic is worded, however, it was perhaps meant that I should merely give you a short résumé of the efforts that have recently been made and the success that thus far has been had in uniting in a federation the various local and state modern language associations of the East and of the Middle West and South for the purpose of bringing out a federation organ which was to be a journal of, by, and for the teachers of modern languages. Still, I shall not allow myself to be limited to such narrow a scope. In fact, what I mean to do primarily, is to discuss before you the whole question of vocational or professional activities, as they ought to find expression in associational or journalistic endeavors, or in both. In other words, I mean to present to you reasons why we teachers of modern languages, especially those of secondary schools, ought to unite and take part in associations and why we ought to support and read, and also write for, modern language journals. Only in conclusion shall I speak of the particular and definite plans that have already been inaugurated to federate the existing local associations for the purpose mentioned, and as to the extent to which these plans have matured.

* A paper read before the Modern Language Conference at the meeting of the National Education Association, held at New York, July, 1916.

Despite the gray hairs noticeable on the heads of some of us, we all know that as a class we modern foreign language teachers are still quite young. Many of us just hopped or simply 'grewed' like Topsy. Modern languages came; we did not get them or bring them. After they had arrived, somebody had to teach them and *we* did the job. We did it as well as we could. It would be useless to open up post-mortem proceedings for the purpose of investigating why or through whose fault so many of our scholastic patients died. Lodging the blame would not resuscitate the dead. On the contrary, I feel it would be far more proper for us to pass a vote of thanks to those engaged in this early teaching for having done no irreparable harm and damage to the medicine they applied and for having saved so many despite their imperfect art. To leave the simile and to become serious, I really feel that the earliest modern language teachers deserve unstinted praise for having inspired so many with a love and appreciation for these languages, so that later on, of their own choice and volition, they selected teaching them as their life vocation. This certainly speaks well of the innate capabilities and the pedagogic skill of the American teacher. If most of us older teachers, however, at one time have been cobblers and day workmen, some evidently worked out their salvation and have become scientific workers, and now it is safe to say, nearly all of us are on the sure road to becoming professional teachers.

Contrary to all other living organisms education grows, as we know, from the top downward. Much of the credit for our advancement, therefore, is due to the higher institutions of learning. They were the first to enrich their curricula, they attracted to their chairs men who were filled with adequate learning and with a love for and a devotion to their subjects, and in turn they sent out young teachers who possessed at least a modicum of learning and a fair appreciation of the subject they were to teach, though until quite recently they, too, had been as much at sea as their elder colleagues once had been with regard to the manner in which they were to proceed and as to how they were to ladle out the goods they had for sale. However, without question, this second generation had one great advantage. They were no longer, to the same extent, day laborers working on a job. They had a better grasp of the whole situation and had a greater outlook upon the

possibilities of their work. They needed no longer to concern themselves so much with the mere subject matter, with the *what*, and thus they had time and leisure to devote themselves to the *how*. If I may use again the simile I used before, they could take and did take the first steps from the trade stage of modern language teaching to the stage of the skilled workman, or to the stage of a profession. This latter stage begins, as we know, when the worker begins to become conscious of the importance of his task, when he begins to formulate in intelligent and intelligible terms the aim and purport of his labor, when he begins to arrange and systematize the various parts of his subject matter, and when he begins to think about the best ways and methods to accomplish the desired results; in other words, a task becomes professional work when it is being reduced to, or being made to rest on, scientific and philosophic principles.

Under ideal conditions a modern language teacher ought, of course, to be equipped with all this professional knowledge before he undertakes teaching. But such conditions nowhere exist and they certainly were not to be found here in the infancy of our vocation. To get it at all, the teachers had to get it for themselves. Some few, of course, might have gotten it, or did get it, all alone by themselves, but ordinarily such professional knowledge is the result of common effort. So it was, too, with our work. Serious modern language teachers, here and there, began to band together, they formed associations. They met to discuss with one another the problems that confronted them and were of common interest to them. The weaker learned from the stronger, and the stronger increased their strength and clarified their views by presenting them to others, and perhaps by being forced to defend them before others. At times I hear a teacher say what is the use of going to this or that meeting? You don't hear anything that is new or important, and besides you can read all that is said in such or such a book. Usually I make no reply to such a statement, but I do form my opinion of that teacher. He or she, even if reputed to be a good class teacher, has not grasped the spirit of the profession and, I am sure, contributes nothing to the uplift of our calling. Of course it is not always possible to point to the tangible gain derived from listening to a paper or from hearing a discussion,—we teachers ought to

know that intellectual gains are not always immediately discernible—but I venture to say that there is not one here who, when summing up the experience of his life, will not say that he has learned more, or at least equally as much, from the experience of others, however humble the others may have been, than, or as, he has learned from the systematic teaching coming from the lips of a professor in the class room. The attitude of our mind is much more friendly and hospitable to facts entering into our life in a casual manner than toward those that are designedly thrust upon us. It is well known that no learned profession in the world has exclusively, or even chiefly, developed in the cloistral halls of the university or in the secluded study of the scholar. Faust found this out. His salvation began when he abandoned seclusion and when he went out into the world to see 'wie die anderen es treiben.' Tasso crumbled to pieces because he thought his brilliant mind was self-sufficient. History is full of examples to fortify my contention. 'Kulturgeschichte' points to the establishment of the 'Societät der Wissenschaften' at Berlin, a merely learned society, as the first indication of a rebirth of Prussia after it had been laid prostrate by the ravages of the wars. So may the first organized gathering of modern language teachers who met to talk over jointly matters concerning their work be looked upon as the beginning of a new era in language teaching, and the multiplication of them is the best assurance for the final success of our effort. And the more such groups we have, therefore, the brighter is the outlook. In fact, this large country of ours ought to be studded with them from one end to the other.

Those of you who are called upon to answer inquiries regarding teachers made by teachers' agencies will have noticed that many of them ask the question "What interest does the candidate take in teachers' associations?" In my earlier days I thought that this was merely a question put in for effect and to fill up space, but today I consider it not only justified but as one of the very best that might be asked. For, a teacher who does not realize that his contact with others is one of the best means for self-improvement lacks, in my judgment, if not *the* most essential, at least *one* of the most essential elements of professional spirit and training. What should we think of a clergyman, or of a lawyer or a physician who did not belong to some body of his confrères where fre-

quently the most vital questions of his profession are treated and decided? Why should it not be the same with us teachers? Even the modern teacher who comes from his college or university equipped with a certificate, who has heard much of methods and theories, who has studied syllabuses and examined text-books and has a general perspective of his work, is, upon entering the schoolroom, a very helpless creature. He may know much about the scientific method of pursuing some definite line of research work, he may be able to trace some new features in the technique of the modern drama, or to lecture on the form of feminism as treated by some recent fiction writer, but whether the lesson book or the reading text introduced in the school by his predecessors will best serve the interest of his pupils, he may none the less not be able to say. By associating with teachers, however, who are similarly placed, by hearing them discuss their local experiences, he might in a very short time and in a most direct way find out just the things he wants and ought to know.

Besides and in addition, there is something else to be gained by people of the same calling uniting together in associations. It is perhaps an imponderable gain, but none the less it is one of the highest value, and a value not to be gained in any other way. It is the feeling of social solidarity, a feeling which creates professional standards, which engenders enthusiasm and ambition in all its members. It was this same spirit of solidarity which in the Middle Ages gave strength and vouchsafed success to the city guilds, and that raised the trades and crafts to the dignity of fine arts. Without imitating the evil features which eventually retarded and ossified all progress, we may to our improvement and advantage adopt much of that spirit. Strength lies in concerted action, and every movement of importance needs strength, collective effort of the many. There is no danger in our period of time and in our democratic country that personal initiative will be crushed. There is little chance for the much tabooed "automatized efficiency."

Some of these gains, as I intimated above, have already been made, especially in the higher strata of modern language teaching. We have a Modern Language Association of America to which presumably all but a few college modern language teachers belong. What this association, during little more than twenty-five years, has

done for modern philology and American scholarship in general I will not relate here, and what it has done and still is doing along lines of social solidarity is evidenced by the fact that no younger member of the profession feels that he can afford not to belong to it. Unfortunately modern language teachers in secondary schools have not kept pace along this line with their college colleagues, at least not in all parts of the country. As a fact, there is no central organization representing their common interests and reacting in so beneficent a way upon the individual secondary teacher as does the Modern Language Association upon all college teachers alike. This is indeed highly regrettable. But there are signs that things are changing. Soon every large city and certainly every state will have a modern language association, and then there will be only a step toward a general federation similar in scope and character to the 'Neuphilologen-Verband' in Germany and other societies elsewhere. When that union has been effected it may be possible that the Modern Language Association of America, the elder brother, who more recently has devoted himself almost exclusively to the promotion of higher learning, will be only too glad to receive the younger brother with his more pedagogic leanings into his fellowship, and then there will be *one* Larger Modern Language Association comprising two separate but coordinate and interacting sections. This, of course, is 'Zukunftsmusik,' but it is a tune which meanwhile we may learn to whistle.

If my remarks as to the need of our joining together in educational associations carries conviction, I trust that each one of you, not already a member of such an association, will consider himself in duty bound to affiliate himself forthwith with one of them or to found one in his city or state if none exists.

Now a word about modern language journalism. You know we possess in this country several modern language publications of which we may be justly proud. Yet outside of the *Monatshefte*, printed chiefly in German and devoted, as the full title indicates, almost exclusively to the teaching of German, none concerns itself directly with the more pedagogic aspects of language work. True, there appear now and then highly valuable proceedings or bulletins of local or state associations, such as those of New England, or of New York State, or of Wisconsin, etc., but owing to their

supposedly local character these publications unfortunately do not reach as large a circle and are not as widely known as their contents really merit. Besides, articles on the aims and methods of secondary modern language teaching appear sporadically in the *School Review*, the *Educational Review*, the *Journal of Education* and other papers, but we have no one paper devoting itself exclusively to the *teaching* of modern languages in school and college, such as nearly every other country possesses one and more. We ordinarily pride ourselves on being at least practical, but as regards this one field of endeavor we have no rights to this claim. It is really astonishing when we consider all the individual effort put into our work that we have so long allowed this energy to be spent and dissipated without collecting it and making it available to all. In every other branch of activity such a waste would be looked upon as lack of efficiency. The best thought contributed somewhere by some one on some phase of our work may be permitted to die unheard or heard only by a few, simply because we lack an organ of publication. Would similar conditions be thinkable in mechanics, law, medicine, or any other branch? Where would these be today in the race with the rest of the world, if they lacked a medium to make new discoveries and innovations the common property of all? It seems to me at times that all that is necessary would be to point to this anomalous condition and a change would be made at once. Meeting with colleagues at stated intervals for discussions of topics related to our work is very necessary and highly profitable, but why not make use of the art of printing instead of limiting ourselves to the once only means of communication, to the method of handing down facts only by mouth and speech. Child nature is much the same in California as it is in Vermont, and with slight modification the standards and aims of scholarship and of life in general are the same in both states; why, then, should a paper read in California and valuable for modern language teachers in that state not have its effect also upon those of Vermont? On this there certainly can be no two opinions and it is really remarkable that some enterprising firm has not long since called a national journal into life, a journal printed in English and covering the teaching of all modern languages in secondary schools. That it would at once have met with success there can be no doubt. Every self-respecting teacher

would, before long, have considered it his duty to subscribe for it, to read it, and many would have gladly written for it. To sum up then, I believe we are justified in claiming that membership in, and cooperation with, some vigorous association, as well as the support of some vocational journal are two essential features of a modern language teacher's equipment.

Now in conclusion I shall say a few words on the topic actually assigned to me, viz. on the Federation and the Proposed Modern Language Journal. And from what I shall have to relate it may appear to you—to follow a German proverb—that I had heretofore attempted to force open doors that long since had stood wide ajar, “dass ich offene Türen eingerannt habe.” Such, however, is true to only a very limited extent. Yes, there is a New England Modern Language Association, there is a New York State Modern Language Association, there is a New York City Language Association of German Teachers, not of Modern Language Teachers, there is now a New Jersey Modern Language Association, and there has been for some years in existence a Modern Language Association of the Middle States and Maryland. All these, after much parleying and arranging of details, have now federated, Prof. Barnes of Union College and Mr. Host of Troy High School being president and secretary-treasurer respectively. The sole purpose of this original federation was both to launch and finance the much longed for journal, a journal not to be the property of any particular firm or institution but one to be owned jointly by all the teachers belonging to any one of the above mentioned associations and by such membership being also members of the federation. Shortly after this federation or at least a part of it had been organized, it was learned that the modern language departments of the University of Chicago, with the aid and under the aegis of the University, was contemplating launching a similar undertaking and adding the new journal to the list of the University's many other publications. At the kind invitation of the committee appointed by those modern language departments the officers of the federation entered into correspondence with the Chicago committee; conferences were arranged and the upshot of the negotiations was that the States of the Middle West and Middle South formed a federation similar to the one existing in the East

with the intention of cooperating with us. At the Cleveland Modern Language Association meeting, last December, arrangements were made for the execution of the common plan. The delegates sent there were charged with power by their respective federations and, while not fusing the management of the two federations but leaving them as separate units, they elected for the next three years Prof. E. W. Bagster-Collins of Teachers College, Columbia University, as Managing Editor of the paper, to be called *THE MODERN LANGUAGE JOURNAL*, and a Board of Associate Editors equitably distributed between the two federations and between the Germanic and Romance branches. As Chief Business Manager was elected Prof. A. Busse, Hunter College, New York City, and as Associate Business Manager Prof. A. Coleman of Chicago. The price of the Journal for members of the Federation was fixed at \$1.00, eight numbers a year; for non-members at \$1.50. The first number is to appear in October of this year.

These, roughly speaking, are the facts with regard to the federation and the proposed Journal. Many minor details are of course still to be settled and worked out in the light of the experience forthcoming. I know that the committees worked hard and tried to make provisions in an a priori fashion for all possible contingencies but, no doubt, some of them will never come up, while decisions reached with regard to others may have to be changed. The first few issues are financially backed by individual promises of the original committee members, but let us hope that they will not be called upon to make good these promises. The prospects are good and if we teachers do our duty toward the project as eagerly as the publishers are doing theirs by promising to advertise, I feel sure the journal will be a success from the start, and before long we shall be in a position to pay those who now give their time and labor to the undertaking for nothing.

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